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About the author

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Extracurricular Activity of International Students at the International Faculty of the Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University in the Era of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University (BSPU) is the oldest pedagogical university in Russia. It was founded in 1930. Since 1990, foreign students have studied at the university. As BSPU is located on the Russian-Chinese border, most foreign students are from China. At present, more than 200 Chinese students are studying at the International Faculty.

The Far East as a whole has a stable zone of cross-border Russian-Chinese interaction, where intercultural dialogue between the two nations has been going on for more than 100 years. Certain areas of intercultural interaction have taken shape; one of the most important aspects of the relationship is humanitarian ties and, in particular, the education of Chinese students at Russian universities, which in the Far Eastern border zone certainly has its own characteristics.

Chinese students come to the Russian Far East to obtain various specialties (natural sciences, technical and humanities). Training in any specialty includes a process of mastering the Russian language and getting acquainted with Russian culture. The Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University has been educating foreign (mostly Chinese) students for 30 years. Now the Chinese students (more than 200 people) study at the International Faculty of BSPU in "Philology" and "Pedagogical education" (within the bachelor's and master's degree respectively), and also master Russian language at preparatory courses during one academic year. The training takes place in the

border areas of the Far East and has its own peculiarities and differences compared to studies in the central regions of Russia. The main difference is the exceptional proximity of China, especially near Blagoveshchensk, where it takes no more than 15 minutes to get to Heihe without going through customs. This, of course, has a direct impact on approaches to teaching Russian as a foreign language.

As soon as a foreign (Chinese) student gets to Russia, his or her training in Russian begins immediately. It becomes a continuous process, because the environment itself facilitates it. Immersion in the language environment is the most important factor in mastering a foreign language. A student is surrounded everywhere by representatives of a different, already Russian, culture, he has to observe the traditions and customs of Russia. At our university we teach the language not only in class, but also outside class hours, and this is one of the distinctive features of our international department: we attach great importance to extra-curricular work with students.

The COVID-19 Pandemic as a challenge in organizing Extracurricular Activity of International Students

The COVID-19 pandemic became a challenge for the Faculty's management and teaching staff. The Russian-Chinese border was closed and students could not return to BSPU to study. The border has been closed for two years already, so the students study remotely. All these factors had a direct impact on the extracurricular activity. In this research we analyze how the essence of extracurricular activity has changed, examine its features in the new conditions of the pandemic, and highlight the forms of work that are used in the distance format. The author concludes that the effectiveness of extracurricular activity is significantly reduced learning remotely, the forms of work are limited. Extracurricular activity, being an important factor of successful teaching Russian as a foreign language, shapes adequate language reactions and behavioural patterns in another cultural environment and promotes successful interaction with representatives of another culture; for its effectiveness it is necessary to open borders and learn offline as soon as possible.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers of the International Department conducted a number of various extracurricular activities with students to help them in mastering the Russian language and Russian culture. These included joint outings to the cinema, concerts, trips to the countryside, cruises on the Amur River, Russian tea parties, gatherings, Russian board games, joint celebrations of Russian holidays. Every year the faculty held "Russian language holiday", where students were involved in various forms of work - games, quizzes, competitions etc.

Now I have listed such fairly common and well-known activities that take place in almost all Russian universities where international students study. What are the forms of work that take place only at ours school? These are, for example, joint forms of work with Russian students; we consider them highly effective activities in teaching Russian as a foreign language. The fact is that there is also a Foreign Languages Faculty at BSPU, where Russian children learn Chinese. The International Faculty and the Faculty of Foreign Languages of BGPU for Chinese students and Russian students who study Chinese jointly hold country study clubs, informative meetings, interactive quests. Binary language classes are practiced, where teachers use types of exercises aimed at developing oral communication skills, overcoming the language barrier, mastering everyday vocabulary. At these classes there are two groups of students (Russian and Chinese), and the class is taught by two teachers. During these classes, the students perform various grammar and vocabulary exercises, allowing the Russian students to deepen their skills in Chinese, and the Chinese students to deepen their skills in Russian. Many of the students later become friends, go to the cinema together, go on walks, help each other in their studies. Every year joint events are organized to commemorate historical dates (Victory Day, the 55th anniversary of the first manned space flight, the 70th

anniversary of the end of World War II, etc.), where Russian and Chinese students act as writers, directors, presenters and actors. In the process of joint training, they mutually learn to understand and hear the speaker of another culture.

Since 2015, the International Faculty has had a bilingual press service (currently, it is the only bilingual press service in the educational space of Russian universities). Students from different courses of the Faculty were involved in the press-service. The areas of their work were determined as creation of journalistic texts of different genres, work on studying professional vocabulary. These challenging tasks became completely new forms of work for both the students and the teacher.

Since October 2015, a course in Journalism has been developed for foreign students of the International Faculty. The objectives of the course are to master the methods of collecting information, working with different sources of information, developing the ability and skills of creating their own publicistic text of different genres, developing the skills of literate and fluent oral and written speech.

The work is structured as follows. In view of the fact that full business communication requires students to acquire theoretical knowledge of journalistic genres, the training programme includes lecture-type classes in which students are introduced to such basic journalistic genres as news, interview, reportage, announcement, photo-reportage. However, knowledge of the characteristics of a particular genre is not sufficient for foreign-language students. Therefore, the study programme also includes the study of special vocabulary as well as work with speech clichés. To develop professional communication skills, students practice standard speech situations that arise when a journalist communicates with a respondent: asking a question, giving a comment, giving an interview, asking for permission to use a tape recorder, etc. You will also learn how to prepare for an interview and how to formulate your questions in an appropriate way.

The knowledge acquired in the classroom is practiced in the real world, with the students informing the "general public" of the Faculty by covering all the activities carried out. Various kinds of articles are created: announcements, interviews, reports, photo-reports on important events at the faculty: familiarization tour around the city for freshmen, initiation into the students, anniversary of BSPU, students' participation in the international contest "Russian speech as music to me", city stage games, etc. In preparation for these texts students talk not only to their classmates, but also to teachers of neighboring faculties, deputy deans and the dean of the faculty, Russian students. In this way, professional communication skills are developed, namely the ability to understand what is being heard, to ask appropriate questions, and to respond to what is being heard in a timely and appropriate manner.

As the students themselves say, in the beginning it was difficult to work in the press service, there were many unfamiliar words. Students didn't understand how to write an article correctly and there were a lot of grammatical mistakes. They didn't know how to get the right information and how to translate into Russian and Chinese. But after a year, they were already used to working in the press office and learned many new words that they couldn't learn in class.

Since 2018, the International Faculty has had a one-of-a-kind international volunteer team called "Ivan and Van". It consists of both Chinese and Russian guys, not necessarily speaking Chinese, just guys who aren't afraid to interact with other peoples and cultures, to learn new things every day and learn to understand each other. The unit is officially registered as one of the areas of the International Faculty of the Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University, and all documents regulating its activities are drawn up. That is, it is not only on the faculty level, but also on the level of the entire university. In general, such a unit is the only one in the Amur Region.

What do the guys consisting in this group do? As they say themselves, with the help of useful and cheerful affairs they study Russian language. At the same time they acquaint Russian children - not only students, but also school students - with Chinese culture. At the university and at the school

in Blagoveshchensk, where the Chinese language is taught, the Chinese students organized a tea ceremony and a master class on weaving Chinese knots, a calligraphy lesson and even making Chinese dumplings. They showed Chinese-language films to Russian children, held quizzes and contests, and conducted country study clubs. Is it worth saying that those Chinese students who are members (or as they call themselves, fighters) of the squadron learn the Russian language very quickly, they master the everyday vocabulary of communication, and learn to interact and react in various speech situations.

Large-scale events at our university, which we will no longer call intramural, but interuniversity and interregional, also help a lot in mastering Russian language. An example of such large-scale interregional event is the annual contest in Russian as a foreign language "Russian speech is like music to me..." among university students of North-East China and foreign students of universities of Far East Russia (with the grant support of the "Russian world" fund). This competition is an author's project of International Faculty of our university, the idea of it was developed by our teachers and for the first time it was held in 2011. The competition consists of several (not less than 3 and not more than 4) rounds and each round is dedicated to a certain theme. So, for example, the theme of the 7th competition, which was held on 29-30 September 2017 at Heihe University, was "Professions".

So, the list of extracurricular activities held at our faculty is quite varied. However, the new type of coronavirus pandemic has made serious adjustments to the educational work. We, the teachers, and our students found ourselves on opposite sides of a border that was closed on 30 January 2020, and continues to be closed to this day. We haven't seen our students for two years now, teaching remotely through the Chinese DingTalk platform. So our classroom work has changed dramatically, and so has the educational work with students. Teachers have begun to choose forms of work that can be conducted remotely and, at the same time, are interesting for students. These are activities aimed at the cultural adaptation of students and the improvement of their language skills. They can be divided according to the competences to be developed into the following areas.

1. Development of students' universal and general professional competences. Virtual excursion around Blagoveshchensk, online event devoted to the New Year, online event "Pancake Day". Cooking traditional Chinese dishes (a project for social networks, a series of videos with recipes of traditional Chinese dishes). How to celebrate the New Year in China (a project for social networks, a series of videos).

2. Development of students' intellectual potential. Online game "What? Where? When?", Olympiad in Russian language. Cinema lecture "Films about the Great Patriotic War" devoted to the Victory Day. Students (in China) laid flowers to monuments of Soviet soldiers who died during the liberation of China. Students prepared a photo report.

3. Formation of professional motivation. Organization of participation of students of preparatory courses in the university festival "Student Autumn", in the university event "Night at the University". Organizational meeting of the International Faculty. Conducting curatorial hours on the current progress of students, on the results of interim certification. Supervision of students' distance work in 1 and 2 semesters. Carrying out the Day of Amur poetry "The soul of the city is revealed by poets". Contest of selfies "The city has a good taste". Participation in the annual competition "Student of the Year 2020".

In April 2021 a thematic week of the Russian language "Russian Language Games: Rebuses" was held at the International Faculty. The events of the thematic week were prepared by Master's students of the Faculty for each Bachelor's and Preparatory year groups. The activities had a pronounced educational orientation and game character. Taking into account the distant format of the work, the theme was chosen, which allowed organizing easy, exciting and informative games and competitions between the groups. For each lesson a certain theme was chosen ("Names of

animals", "Computer", "Russian names", etc.), multimedia presentations were developed, a selection of puzzles on the chosen theme was compiled, many puzzles were compiled independently. Some thematic events were held in the form of a competition. These events allowed students to better understand the learning material on phonetics, to analyze the sound and letter composition of words, to actualize the prepositional forms of words, the meaning of prepositions. The Russian puzzles aroused students' interest, as in Chinese there is no similar language game. The extracurricular activities were conducted remotely on the DingTalk platform.

4. Counteraction to terrorism and extremism ideology. Conducting a talk on the rules of behaviour in public places under Covid-19 conditions. The activity was conducted by courses - depending on the complexity of the material and the form of the lesson. The main content in the 3rd-4th year - information boards and Russian announcements about the new rules of conduct in public places. In junior courses - comparison of Chinese and Russian announcements, warnings and other information stands on the rules of visiting public places, greetings, personal hygiene, etc.

5. Assistance to adaptation of first-year students. Organization of tutor support: work of tutors (public curators - members of MCO "Ivan and Van") with new groups. Assisting students with the necessary paperwork. Orientation of first-year students with the university setting. General meeting online: explanation of the rules of the educational process, terms of the semester, the rules of admission to the exam session, the timing of exam sessions.

6. Preventive and socio-educational work. Curatorial chats were created on the DingTalk platform, where students asked questions and received answers there. Personal questions were dealt with on an individual basis.

Conclusion

Despite the diversity of activities, a wide range of educational work areas preserved in the international faculty in the COVID-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of educational work is significantly reduced in distance learning, the forms of work are limited. The important condition of educational work - the presence of the student and teacher in the same environment is not observed, the joint work on the problem set can only be carried out partially, as far as it is possible in distance learning conditions. There is a decrease in students' interest in the remote format of communication, low activity compared to the level of their activity when studying in Russia.

Educational work, being an important factor for successful teaching Russian as a foreign language, forms adequate language reactions and behavioural patterns in a different cultural environment and promotes successful interaction with representatives of another culture, and for its effectiveness it is necessary to open borders and learn off-line as soon as possible.